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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000493

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: USG PRESS RELEASE SPARKS BACKLASH FROM GOG, AND
PUBLIC DISCUSSION

REF: CONAKRY 0475

Classified By: A/DCM SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. An August 20 USG press release regarding Guinea's transition process has the military junta led GoG in an uproar. The Guinean Minister of Foreign Affairs privately criticized the USG's position in an unprofessional tirade aimed at the A/DCM and A/PAO, which was quickly followed by a public tirade released as an official communique to the local press. The GoG accused the USG of interfering in domestic affairs and emphasized that all CNDD members are at liberty to run for president. Les Forces Vives responded with their own declaration, marking their firm opposition to Dadis as a candidate. These declarations have sparked a lively debate. Some Guineans are determined to support Dadis as a candidate while others are fiercely opposed to the idea. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The USG issued a press release on August 20 to register our disappointment with the announcement that elections in Guinea will be delayed to 2010 (reftel). In the statement, which the Department drafted with input from the Embassy, we urged the GoG to formally commit to the new electoral timetable, and stressed that any candidacy on the part of a CNDD member would undermine transparency and credibility.

MINISTER REPRIMANDS US DIPLOMATS

¶3. (SBU) At 7AM on Saturday (August 22), the Office of Protocol at the Guinean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) called to convoke the Charge and Public Affairs Officer to a 10AM meeting with Foreign Minister Luoua to discuss the USG's press statement. In accordance with our policy of handling ministerial meetings at the DCM level, A/DCM and Acting PAO responded to the convocation.

¶4. (SBU) Besides the Minister, approximately seven other GoG officials were in the room, including the MFA Secretary General. Minister Luoua began the meeting cordially by shaking hands and exchanging a few pleasantries. However, the meeting quickly took on another tone as Luoua launched into a fifteen minute tirade against the USG. He initially asked if the press statement had been released in Washington or in Conakry. A/DCM explained that the release had been drafted in Washington and approved by A/S Ambassador Carson, but that the Embassy had issued it locally. That was the only time during the meeting that the USG was permitted to speak despite several attempts to get a word in edgewise and return the meeting to a more cordial exchange.

¶5. (SBU) Luoua's rant touched on a number of different issues although he spent the most time arguing over the first paragraph of the USG's press release, which he felt made it look like CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara had unilaterally

appointed the Ad Hoc Committee on Elections rather than acknowledging that it was assembled by Les Forces Vives. From there, he accused the Embassy of failing to keep Washington informed of the "Guinean reality," and of operating independently, without regard to US foreign policy. He went on at some length about how the international community does not really understand what is going on in Guinea.

¶6. (SBU) The second issue that clearly touched a nerve was our statement about the possible candidacy of a CNDD member. Luoua accused the USG of meddling in Guinean internal affairs, emphasizing that Guinea is a sovereign nation: "just because you are a superpower does not mean you get to tell others what to do." Luoua said that Guinea is on the verge of a civil war and the CNDD is the only entity trying to keep the country from descending into chaos. He implied that the USG's statement was inflammatory and could spark the civil war that they are trying to prevent.

¶7. (SBU) Other particularly memorable comments include: "You can take your \$2.8 million for elections and leave the country," "you always talk about the problems, but never the goods things the CNDD is doing, such as fighting drugs," and "if you didn't have elections to complain about, you would have started whining about human rights abuses."

¶8. (SBU) After ranting for a full fifteen minutes, Luoua said "I did not call you here for a dialogue." When A/DCM asked if she could have an opportunity to respond, Luoua replied "No, you can leave." Embassy officers did so.

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GOG ACCUSES USG OF INTERFERING IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

¶9. (U) Several hours later, the MFA issued a formal communique to the local press highlighting many of the same issues Luoua raised in the meeting with A/DCM. The GoG stated that the USG press release is tantamount to external interference in domestic affairs. The communique explains that only Guineans have the right to choose their leaders, without outside influence or pressure, and that as such, "any member of the CNDD and of the government, including the Prime Minister, is free to present as a candidate in the elections if they so desire."

¶10. (U) The MFA's statement then discusses how it is inappropriate for the USG to denounce military officials as potential candidates since there are plenty of historic examples to choose from, including President Eisenhower. The MFA specifically mentions the recent example of Mauritania twice, as proof that the international community, including the United States, have no problem accepting a military leader of a country, even one who has seized power in a coup.

LES FORCES VIVES FIGHT BACK

¶11. (U) This August 22 GoG communique then sparked an immediate response from Les Forces Vives on August 23, which states that the Forum of Les Forces Vives of Guinea:

- is firmly opposed to the candidature of any CNDD member, including its president, in the upcoming presidential elections;
- categorically rejects the ordinance creating the National Transition Council (CNT) whose current composition was unilaterally modified by Dadis;
- vigorously denounces the continued militarization of the State;
- reaffirms the need for a return to constitutionality and rule of law as a means for guaranteeing peace and economic development; and

- calls for a general mobilization of all Guineans to oppose the CNDD's confiscation of power. In addition, Les Forces Vives expressed its discontent with the CNDD's monopolization of media and use of public resources to advance Dadis' candidacy.

¶12. (C) Embassy sources indicate that the Forces Vives' declaration was principally drafted by a trio of youth political activists (and excellent Embassy contacts): Mouctar Diallo, Dansa Kourouma, and Yacouba Konate. Opposition political leader Jean-Marie Dore (UPG) was supposed to read the declaration as the official spokesperson for Les Forces Vives, but left before the meeting was over. Yacouba Konate ultimately read the declaration. Contacts speculate that Dore was not able to read the declaration because it would have jeopardized the personal relationship he has cultivated with Dadis.

PUBLIC RESPONSE

¶13. (U) An article issued by Paris AFP on August 24 reports on an interview with Dadis shortly after the Forces Vives' declaration was issued. Dadis reportedly claimed that if the opposition wants to stop him from being a candidate, "it is they who do not understand anything about democracy. I have nothing more to say, except that I might or might not stand. No one can stop me."

¶14. (U) The two government communiques and the subsequent declaration by Les Forces Vives has sparked intense debate in Guinea. Throughout the weekend, callers on radio talk shows aired their opinions. Some Guineans criticized the USG's "meddling" while others expressed their opposition to Dadis' candidacy. Others were very much pro-Dadis.

¶15. (U) A large group of women gathered at Camp Alpha Yaya on August 22 to demonstrate their support for Dadis. They reportedly stated that they did not see a need to hold elections at all since Dadis is already their chosen president. According to press reports, Dadis responded by saying "your ambitions, your desires are very welcome. We will not humiliate you. We will respect your words. No external pressure can mortgage our liberty. We will obey you."

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SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE DIP CORP

¶16. (C) Other diplomats have also taken note of the controversy. During a G8 meeting on August 20, they all had an opportunity to review the USG's press release before it was issued, and all were in agreement that it was a strong statement that touched on the main issues. During a cocktail party on August 22, the French DCM told A/DCM that the incident indicates that the CNDD is feeling the pressure and is grasping at straws. The Spanish Ambassador agreed, pointing out that Dadis had already publicly humiliated the German Ambassador for stating the international community's position. In a separate conversation, the Spanish Ambassador told Charge that while the current discussion is a good thing, it would be prudent to not escalate the situation any further until the International Contact Group comes in for its next visit on September 2. The ECOWAS Ambassador made a similar statement to the Charge.

COMMENT

¶17. (C) The strength of the GoG's reaction is somewhat surprising given that the USG's press release was relatively

mild and did not contain any surprises. The fact that it so quickly hit a nerve suggests that Dadis is increasingly committed to running for election and maintaining the military's grip on power. One Embassy source said that Dadis was "enraged" upon reading the press release and wanted to handle the issue himself until his advisors talked him into letting the MFA handle it. However, a military source indicate the opposite, saying that Dadis was unconcerned and that Minister Luoua acted independently out of a sense of self preservation since his job has reportedly been on the line for some time. Either way, it is clear that the message was not well received.

¶18. (C) The complete lack of professionalism on the part of the Minister was highly inappropriate, especially given that Luoua is a career diplomat. Previous interactions with him have always been cordial and professional, but this was not the case on August 22. Luoua's overall tenor and comportment suggest that he was not simply redirecting Dadis' anger after likely having been subjected to tongue lashing. Rather, Luoua's anger seemed more personal, suggesting that he was personally insulted and likely firmly supportive of Dadis.

¶19. (SBU) Embassy is working with the Department to formulate a response and is looking forward to the arrival of the International Contact Group next week, which will hopefully drive home the points we made in our press release. At the same time, the local debate continues and Embassy is watching the situation closely. END COMMENT.
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